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CV

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DIRETTA DA

GHERARDO GNOLI

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ADRIANO V. ROSSI

ELUSIVE IDENTITIES IN PRE-ACHAEMENID IRAN: THE MEDES AND THE MEDIAN LANGUAGE

1.1. In his most recent treatment of the "language of the Medes" (*Die Sprache der Meder – eine Grosse unbekannte*[1]), Rüdiger Schmitt restates very clearly the founding criteria for the recognition of the linguistic features which may be ascribed to the "Median language" ("Grundlage für jede Definition eines Sprachmerkmals als typisch medisch").

The criteria declared by Schmitt – coinciding with those listed at the beginning of his article *Medisch* in the *Reallexicon der Assyriologie*[2] – are

* All opinions presented here – though their details remain under the direct responsibility of the author – result from collective discussions within the team (G.P. Basello, E. Filippone, G. Giovinazzo) of the Italo-Iranian Project DARIOSH (= *Digital Achaemenid Royal Inscription Open Schema Hypertext*). The Project – directed by the present writer – is planned by "L'Orientale" University of Naples and IsIAO, in cooperation with the "La Tuscia" University of Viterbo, the National Archaeological Museum of Téhéran and the Foundation Persepolis-Pasargadae. Its aims are a new edition of the royal Achaemenid epigraphy, with photographic documentation and an exhaustive commentary. Since 2005 the researches are partly financed by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR), under PRIN contracts 2005105580 and 2007ZKPPSM.

Mada (in any cuneiform writing) should be understood as referring to those peoples whom the Assyrians associated with Indo-Iranian onomastica and toponyms in the central Zagros (Brown 1986: 107 fn. 2); *Māda-* renders any occurrence of this term in OP; analogously *Parsa ~ Pārsa-*.

Note: Med. = Median, OP = Old Persian, AE = Achaemenid Elamite, AB = Achaemenid Babylonian, AA = Achaemenid Aramaic. The transcription of OP (broadly phonemic, and used when is more adequate to the arguments than the transliteration) follows criteria which will be treated in a different place.

[1] Text (published as Schmitt 2003) of R. Schmitt's communication to the International Meeting which took place at Padua from the 26th to the 28th April 2001.

[2] Schmitt 1990: 617-18; The same author discusses (in a shorter form) the concept of "Median language" also in Schmitt 1989 and 2000, as well as in a pioneering treatment of the dialectal differentiations in Old Iranian (id. 1984).

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two: (a) words explicitly marked as "Median"; (b) words found in a clear (*eindeutig*) "Median" context. Typical example of the first criterion is Herodotus' quotation (I 110, 1) of the feminine name Σπακώ, explained by a typical, Alexandrian gloss τὴν γὰρ κύνα καλέουσι σπάκα Μῆδοι "the Medes call the bitch *spáka*", where *spáka* is an alleged Median form for which an (asterisked) OP **saka-* is reconstructed, patterned on the Middle Persian and New Persian *sag*-type words for "dog". Example of the second criterion is the anthroponym *Xšaθrita-*, the "dynastic" name claimed by the pretender Phraortes (OP *Fravartiš*), who rebelled against Darius (DB/OP 2.13-17): the name, interpreted by Schmitt as an **-ita-* hypocoristic, would permit the reconstruction of a Median stem **xšaθra-*, complementary to OP *xšaṣṣa-*, the only attested form, and therefore assure the correspondence Med. *-θr-* ~ OP *-ṣṣ-*.

Starting from these two typologies, Schmitt devises a matrix with four phonetic traits dialectally distinctive:

(1) Herodotus' *spaka-* assures the variance Med. *-sp-* ~ OP *-s-* (< IE **-ḱu̯*), as attested in OP[3] *aspa-* and compounds, *vispa-* and compounds, etc.;

(2) the *zana-* "variant" (as e.g. in the OP compound *vispa-zana-*, at variance with a reconstructed OP **visa-dana-*), etc., permits the generalization that *all* personal names containing (an alleged Med.) *-zana-* should be "Median" (i.e. would belong to an onomastic system denominating "ethnically Median" people by means of nominal compounds complying with phonetic and morpho-syntactic rules of the Median language). From here it derives a further generalization of the Med. *z* ~ OP *d* variance (if < IE **ǵ* or *ǵʰ*): this marker is "reinforced" (*erhärtet*) by an alleged variance Med. *z* ~ OP *d* in dual writings of anthroponyms (*Doubletten von Namenformen*) appearing in the different DB versions, and this would allow e.g. the reconstruction of Med. **Brziya-* (indirectly documented in AB transcriptions pointing to /barz°/ [cf. e.g. Tavernier 2007: 14 no. 1.2.10] and in DB/AA l. 41 <b[r]zy> [*ibid.*: 48 no. 2.2.12], = DB/AB l. 74 [*bar*]*-zi-ia*) at variance with OP *Brdiya-* and Greek Σμέρδις[4];

(3) the existence, at variance with OP <θuxr> /Θuxra-/, of an AB <ˡsu-uh̲-ra-'>, interpreted as "Median equivalent of Θukra-"[5], would

[3] Skjærvø 2006: 376 labels "the 'Median' forms in Old Persian" as "Med./OPers.". Any symbolic choice may anyhow cause a possible inconsequence; therefore "OP" marks here all forms documented in the Iranian-language versions of the Achaemenid inscriptions.

[4] Another example quoted by Schmitt is the reconstructed Med. **Artavarzya-* (Schmitt writes **Ṛ+tavarziya*) documented through AB <ˡar-ta-mar-zi-ia> and AA <'rtwrzy> (vs OP <rtvrdⁱiy> *Artavardya-*, documented in DB/OP iii 30-31, 33, 36, 43).

[5] Tavernier 2007: 63 no. 2.2.54. *Θukra-* is the name of the noble (possibly *Pārsa-*, because DB/OP iv 84 defines his son as *Pārsa-*) father of Utana- (= ʾΟτάνης), one of the six *anušya-* supporting Darius in his political struggles.

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attest the voiceless correlative of the preceding (2), i.e. Med. *s* ~ OP *θ* (< IE **ḱ*)[6];

(4) Med. *-θr-* ~ OP *-s̲s̲-* (< IE **-tr-*), assured through the "Median"[7] anthroponym *Xšaθrita-*, would be confirmed by the dual writing of the "Median" anthroponym **Čiθran-taxma-*[8] (according to Schmitt implicit in AB *ši-it-ra-an-taḫ-ma-*) ~ OP *Čis̲s̲an-taxma-*[9]; to the doublets OP *xšas̲s̲a-* ~ Med. **xšaθra-* and OP *čis̲s̲a-* ~ Med. **čiθra-* a further anthroponym (if containing Ir. **"fire") could be added, i.e. OP *āss°* (in OP *Ās̲s̲ina-*, DB/OP i 74 etc., cf. DB/AE i 57 etc. *ha-iš-ši-na*) ~ Med. **āθr°* (Med. **Āθrina-*, cf. DB/AB 30, 31, 33 *at-ri-na-'*, but DBc/AB *a-ši-⌜na⌝*[10]).

1.2. As regards further possible markers (appeared for long time in the list of the "Median" features), Schmitt is rather severe ("der vermeintliche Lautwandel von iran. **hu̯-* zu med. *f*"; "sind die Listen der für medisch ausgegebenen Lautentwicklungen [...] bei Kent 1953, 8f. §§ 8-9 erheblich zu kürzen", cf. id. 2003: 25, 26 fn. 9; "die wenigsten der für das Medische in Anspruch genommenen Lautentwicklungen speziell medisch sind", cf. id. 2003: 34). According to Schmitt[11], excluding *f-* < **hu̯-* from the alleged Median peculiar features (and consequently excluding from the Median language a key concept in the Avestan ideology such as OP *farnah-* ~ Av. *x^{v}arənah-*) would put an end to a quarrel dragged on for years and remove the paradox by which Median would be an *f*-dialect in which however a major dynastic anthroponym such as *Uvaxšt(a)ra* (= Κυαξάρης) would

[6] Schmitt admits that this feature would be documented only through a *hapax*: "nachweisbar ist dies nur in [...] med. **Suxra* [...] vs altpers. *Θukra*", (id. 2003: 25).

[7] Note that *Xšaθrita-* in DB is not a "Median name", but the name assumed by an usurper in search of a connection to the "Median dynasty" (and this only in the case in which OP <uvxštr>/AE *ma-ak-iš-tar-ra*/AB *ú-ma-ku-iš-tar* should be analyzed as = Κυαξάρης, as mostly accepted after Cameron (1936: 174-77) but also rejected in recent times (cf. Young 1988: 19, Dandamaev & Medvedskaya 2006). Mayrhofer (1979: 27 no. 51) comments prudently: "Medischer Name, dessen Lautung und Deutung umstritten sind".

[8] Composed with **čiθra-* ("brave in lineage", Tavernier 2007: 14 no. 1.2.11).

[9] "Med.-pers. Hybridbildung" according to Mayrhofer (1979: 17 no. 22), who contrasts a hypothetical "vollpers. **Čiça^{n}ta^{n}ma-*", documented through AE *ti-iš-šá-an-tam$_{s}$-ma*, and a hypothetical "vollmed. **Čiθra^{n}taxma-*", documented through AB *ši-it-ra-an-taḫ-ma* and AE *zí-ut-ra-an-tak-ma* and through an original, unassimilated form **Τιτρ° adapted into Herodot's Τριταντα͡ίχμης (Schmitt 1978: 45); similarly Tavernier 2007: 14-15 and 48 (1.2.11, 2.2.13, 2.2.14). In this case, if we are confronted with the same anthroponym, the combination of the documentation would permit the reconstruction, through the Elamite writing, of the whole diaphragmatic range of pronunciation of the glide joining the syllables *ta°* and *°ma* in OP *tahma-*, from Ø (*ti-iš-šá-an-tam$_{s}$-ma*, PF 48: 3-4) to plosive (DB/AE ii-iii *passim zí-iš-šá-in-tak-ma*).

[10] von Voigtlander 1978: 49: "Possibly the name is written thus taken from the Elam. *ha-ši-na* in the inscription directly above".

[11] But cf. recently Elfenbein 2001; Tremblay 2008: 35-36; Gnoli, forthcoming.

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contain in its initial part a phonetic nexus typical for *xw*-dialects[12]. Several further *shibboleth*s devised by Benveniste (1931) and further increased by Kent (1953)[13], are excluded by Schmitt from the central nucleus of his argument.

1.3. In conclusion, on the basis of the "lauthistorische [...] Charakteristika" as reported in (1)-(4) above, Schmitt reaffirms the general NW Iranian characteristic of the Median language, but also stresses that together with this language one should imagine further NW Iranian languages (such as e.g. "das Alt-Parthische als Vorläufer des bezeugten [Mittel-]parthischen"), so that the automatic attribution of any non-Persian feature to it is impossible: "Median language" cannot be conceived as a "Sammelbegriff für Nordwestiranisch" (Schmitt 2003: 26).

2. The central section of Schmitt's article (*Indirekte Zeugnisse des Medischen*) could leave the reader somehow perplexed.

Many doubts are advanced which the reader may widely share: (1) "Median" and "Persian" in the ancient tradition often imply a "para-synonymic" reference (*mehr oder weniger gleichbedeutend*), and consequently the appearance of either of the two with no further specification is no reliable guide to judge if a particular anthroponym belongs to a specific language (Schmitt 2003: 27, with reference to Tuplin 1994); (2) anthroponyms and/or toponyms as attested in the Assyrian documents from 8th to 7th century BCE are of questionable interpretation, mainly due to the nature of the syllabic system to which they are adapted[14]; (3) the language of the Royal Achaemenid inscriptions is to be considered as a *Kunstsprache* ("in gewissem Sinne [...] eine Kunstsprache") containing archaisms, stylistic peculiarities and dialectal stratifications of difficult analysis (*ibid*.: 29); (4) dual (or more) writings (< "Median" ~ "OP") of anthroponyms in the Elamite tablets have no high probative value, because, differently from quotations in royal inscriptions, one cannot prove with certainty that the allographies of the tablets may be referred to the same individual (*ibid*.: 33); (5) the attribution to the *-zana*-compounds of a

[12] Analogous perplexity appears in Kent 1953: 41 § 118iv: "the *f* instead of OP *hu* from *su* seems to be a Median peculiarity, although Intaphernes was one of the Persians who aided Darius to overthrow the false Smerdis". See more widely below.

[13] See p. 301 below.

[14] *Ibid*.: "Die etymologischen Deutungen [...] sind nur zum kleineren Teil einigermaßen gesichert; oft ist über bloße Vermutungen nicht hinauszukommen, und in vielen Fällen sind selbst solche nicht einmal vertretbar". The series *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften prepares two volumes dedicated to the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian/Late Babylonian *Nebenüberlieferung*.

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"Median" origin because of their *-z-* (and correspondingly the individuation in the *-dana-* ones of "die aktuelle, echt-persische Form") would originate the paradox by which DNa/AE *mi-iš-šá-da-na* would be the Elamite rendering of a reconstructed OP **visa-dana-*, while the "Median" form of this epithet (traditional and formulaic in the royal titulary) would be attested through DNa/OP *vispa-zana-* (*ibid*.: 30-31, 36).

One may note however that Schmitt often shifts from the historical level of discourse to the linguistic one and vice versa, and many of his assumptions are based on inferences taken for granted but not demonstrated. Consider the following three points as an example:

(a) the Medes are *the only*[15] population which in the first half of the I millennium BCE could have had the opportunity to interact with the authors of the Assyrian documents mentioning *Mada* in central Zagros and surrounding regions;

(b) the "impulse" (*Anregung*) to the cuneiform writing usage[16] – and with it, the experience necessary to organize written archives – would represent a Median element in the Achaemenid state structure, and this would be proved by the fact that OP *nipišta-* "writing, written document"[17] would be a Median borrowing > OP;

(c) Media would maintain a particular position in the Achaemenid political hierarchy, and the Medes in general would have deeply influenced the Persians (*ibid*.: 34); the consequence is that, since linguistic loanwords move from major prestige languages to minor prestige ones, loanwords of high-level (state/military hierarchies etc.) strata of the lexicon in OP cannot be other than Median.

One could object to the three points above what follows:

(a) It is indisputable that Neo-Assyrian sources repeatedly mention *Mada*, but at the same time one should agree with S.C. Brown's formulation that "It is admittedly difficult to know precisely what the Assyrians meant by the epithet 'Mede'" (Brown 1986: 107). For long time the idea prevailed that the Medes were a conglomeration of peoples in which the Iranian element was not necessarily dominant; in I.M. D'jakonov's mature thinking, notwithstanding his previous views (in *Istorija Midii* and elsewhere) in

[15] *Ibid*.: 26: "*nur* [emphasis added – AVR] die Meder engere Kontakte zu jenen Völkern gehabt haben dürften, von denen uns schriftliche Quellen erhalten sind".

[16] "Anregung zum Gebrauch (und gegebenfalls zur Schaffung) einer Schrift", (*ibid*.: 32). On this point Schmitt's stand has slightly changed as compared with id. 1997: 128-29: "Anregung zum Schriftgebrauch und zur Schaffung einer eigenen Schrift".

[17] Id. 1997: 128; cf. also *ibid*. 1997: 129: "[die Meder ...] den *Vorgang der Handhabung dieses Schriftsystems* [emphasis added – AVR] mit dem Verbum med. **ni-paiṣ-* bezeichnet haben". As remarked by the author, this term is culturally marked in so far as implies a primary reference to the "Kenntnis der Schrift".

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favour of an ethno-linguistic diversity among the Neo-Assyrian *Mada*[18], this conception appears rather mitigated[19]. On the other hand, one should consider that even the latest and most complete monograph on the subject[20] comes to an end with a general statement to this effect: "There is little doubt that Greater Media underwent a process of Iranization during the Neo-Assyrian period"[21]; therefore the prudent formulation of the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (according to which "The Assyrians encountered Indo-Iranian elements, presumably Median, in areas other than Media proper [...] Indo-Iranian onomastics also occur in connection with the autochthonous Zagros kingdoms [...] This emphasizes the fallacy of assuming ethnic homogeneity for any of the polities of the Neo-Assyrian Zagros"[22]), should be considered as the only possible statement on the matter.

(b) The reconstruction of **ni-paiṣ-*[23] with reference to writing activities may only hint that in an indetermined Iranian antiquity a certain metaphor was produced by an Iranian-speaking people, who had come into contact with the writing technology at some undetermined time. Even those who

[18] Cf. D′jakonov 1956: 65: "ne vse midjane i ne iznačal′no govorili na ètom jazyke"; cf. anche *ibid.*: 149-50: "vpolne vozmožno, čto midijskij plemennoj sojuz suščestvoval ešče kak sojuz neiranskix plemen i čto iranskaja čast′ midijskogo naselenija byla liš′ pozže konstituirovana v otdel′noe 'plemja ariev'". "Incorrect statement(s)" (Radner 1999: 198, cf. Schmitt 2003: 23 fn. 2) as Radner's "Median is not an Indo-Europaean language" (even if based on different assumptions) may sound as extreme positions in this direction. Zadok (2002: 91) declares that Radner's statement acted on him as "the final trigger" for the production of *The ethno-linguistic character of Northwestern Iran and Kurdistan in the Neo-Assyrian period*.

[19] Cf. Diakonoff 1985: 56: "in the Assyrian inscriptions of the 9th to 8th centuries B.C., relating to the campaigns in the *western* part of the historical region of Media, the number of non-Iranian place names exceeds the Iranian, [...] and the number of non-Iranian personal names of rulers falls short by only a few of the Iranian. [...] Thus down to the 8th century B.C. the Iranian-speaking element [...] had clearly not fully prevailed, although our former assertion that Iranisms were wholly absent down to the end of the 8th century west of a line from Tabriz to Hamadan needs revision".

[20] Zadok 2002. In it, an impressive quantity of onomastica is considered: 221 individuals and 475 toponyms (42 of which, damaged and uncertain, are not included in the statistics, *ibid.*: 89).

[21] Among the most numerous onomastic groups of Greater Media, those possibly Iranian (according to Zadok) rarely exceed one third, but their absolute totals rarely go beyond ten names, so that no real statistical approach can be considered valid. According to the author "the available material seems to be sufficient only for determining the ethno-linguistic *character* of the territory under discussion, but not its ethno-linguistic *composition*: for such a task the material is too scanty" (Zadok 2002: 90, emphasis added). Windfuhr 2006: 380 appears more optimist on the possibility to resort to such "statistical" data.

[22] In the section *Language and Ethnic Identity* of the article *Medien (Media)* = Brown 1987-1990: 619-20.

[23] Provided that the Iranian etymology, mostly accepted, is correct.

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consider **ni-paiṣ-* as Median cannot prove that the creators of the writing technology as applied to Iranian languages had undoubtely been the Medes, and that from these the Achaemenids would have inherited it.

(c) We owe to Eduard Meyer the assumption[24] (widely repeated even today[25]) that the Medes would occupy a particular position both in the *dahyāva*-lists and in the Achaemenid imperial hierarchy; but today we know that the position occupied by Media in the Achaemenid *dahyāva*-lists varies considerably, and no agreement has been reached among scholars as for the political meaning of this variance[26]. Schmitt (2003: 34 fn. 32) maintains that the "hervorgehobene Stellung Mediens in Achaimenenidenreich", is demonstrated by the formulation *uta pārsai uta mādai uta anyāuva dahyušuva* "in Persia as well as in Media and the other countries"[27], repeated

[24] "Nehmen die Meder im Reich die nächste Stellung nach den Persern ein. 'Persien, Medien und die anderen Länder' nennt Darius sein Reich, 'König von Persien und Medien' heißt Xerxes in Babylon" (Meyer 1939[3]: 23). According to Meyer, Media "lebt weiter [...] umgewandelt in das Perserreich": this would be the reason why "den Fernerstehenden kam die innere Umwälzung gegenüber dem Fortbestehen eines mächtigen iranischen Reichs kaum zum Bewußtsein: daher haben die Griechen wie andere Völker den Medernamen auf das Perserreich übertragen" (*ibid*.: 24).

[25] Cf. e.g. "In the Achaemenid empire, Media retained its previleged position, occupying the second place after Persia itself" (Dandamayev & Medvedskaya 2006: 10); "Dans les listes impériales, les Mèdes (ou la Médie) sont toujours nommés en première position, soit en seconde après que les Perse aient été cités" (Tourovets 2001: 230).

[26] *Māda-* appears five times after *Pārsa-* (DNa, DNe, DSe, XPh, A[3]Pb), three times in different positions: tenth position in DB, third position (after *Pārsa-* and *Ūja*) in DPe and DSab. On the contrary DSm, in which *Māda-* would rank ninth (so Kent 1953: 145, similarly Asheri 1990: 382 no. 6; Lecoq 1997: 239; Briant 2002: 183), is nonexistent (cf. already Hinz 1941: 243): Brandenstein (1932: 55-58) combined under a single label two enamelled brick fragments probably belonging to display versions of DSe/OP and/or DSf/OP. The central position of the (properly) "Iranian" *dahyāva*s (while the other are situated all around, like the spokes of a wheel, cf. Herrenschmidt 1976: 59 fn. 29), is emphasized by Gnoli 1989: 21-23. On the hierarchy of sculptured *Völkertypen* cf. Tourovets 2001: 228-30 (with previous literature). Note that OP *Māda-* is classified as geographical name in AB versions, and as ethnonym (both singular and plural) in AE versions.

[27] Schmitt 1991: 51; "both in Persia and in Media and in the other provinces", (Kent 1953: 119). Note Diakonoff 1985: 147: "Darius I in the record of the events of the beginning of his reign still sets off Persia and Media *together* against 'other [i.e. conquered] lands', or in Akkadian, 'lands of another tongue'". D′jakonov's "still" means that *arya-* is conceived both as designation of the Iranian "Gesamtvolk" and of his common language; cf. also Szemerényi 1977: 148: "part of the Indo-Iranians which had *via* the Caucasus entered [...] the Near East acquainted itself with the [...] local term for 'kinsman, companion' and adopted it in the form *arya-* [...] which [...] later became *the overall term for their nationality*" [emphasis added – AVR]). The same view is in Zadok 1981: col. 665 ("[in DPg] Persian and Median are *still* [emphasis added – AVR] considered the same language"), quoting D′jakonov (1956: 149, fn. 3). DPg/LB 6-8 and 15-16 may be interpreted (cf. already Rossi 1984: 54-55), differently from D′jakonov e Zadok, in the sense "*Pārsa-* (with its *Pārsa*-language), *Māda-* (with its

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various times in DB/OP: but if we observe that in DB/AB, <KUR par-su> and <KUR ma-da-a-a> are followed twice by Babylonia[28], and a third time by Babylonia and Elam[29], we have to conclude that the lists do not appear to have been intended "as a realistic picture of the state of the imperial possessions"[30].

Therefore, in Schmitt's reconstruction of the linguistic picture of pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Iran we can recognize several of the arguments typical of the discussion of the "Median question" half-way between linguistic history and ethno-historical reconstruction[31], and especially the persuasion of a direct correlation between ethnicity and language in each community, and of a direct correlation between onomastic processes, ethnicity and major linguistic varieties prevailing in the communities. Contemporary ethno-linguistic situations, where multi-lingualism and multi-ethnicism are the rule and not the exception, prove that both correlations should not be taken for granted (cf. e.g. Duranti 1997: 51 ff.).

Just to offer an example coming from our everyday experience, how many scholars, even among those specialized in oriental studies, would not be ready to bet that the inhabitants of the Republic of Afghanistan are

Māda-language) and the other peoples/countries with their languages". One should anyhow consider that (cf. already Rossi 1981: 186-87 fn. 209; 1984: 54-55) in what appears to us as the same label two different *taxa* are possibly implied: (1) "*Arya* [...] en iranien [...] c'est un mot inanalysable servant seulement à nommer ceux qui relèvent d'une même appartenance ethnique", Benveniste 1969/1:370; (2) "name conventionally referred to the languages of *Arya*- in one or more of its phases". Note Gnoli 1989: 17: "OP *arya*- [...] maintains to some extent an ethnic meaning that is connected not so much with a political situation as with a cultural and religious heritage. Within these limits we may agree that OP *arya*- is a definition of 'Gesamtvolk'". For **arya*- as a "Gesamtname" cf. already Geiger 1882: 167-68.

[28] DB/AB ll. 14-15: *ina KUR par-su ina KUR ma-da-a-a ina DIN.TIR.KI u ina KUR.KUR á-ni-e-tú*; l. 19: *KUR par-su KUR ma-da-a-a DIN.TIR.KI KUR.KUR á-ni-e-ti*.

[29] DB/AB ll. 16-17: *KUR par-su KUR ma-da-a-a E.KI KUR NIM.MA.KI KUR.KUR á-ni-e-ti*.

[30] Briant 2002: 176; cf. also Liverani 2003: 11: "the role of Media inside the Persian empire remains quite peculiar, at least according to the classical sources (the Old Persian royal inscriptions are more ambiguous on this point)", and fn. 28 there (where Liverani's statement "Persia is followed always by Elam" should be amended). On the possibility of identifying criteria in the list structure see also Vogelsang's explanation, based on the orientation assumed by the author of the inscriptional text: Vogelsang 1986: 131-35 [= § 3 *The so-called 'Rangaufstieg' of Māda*], particularly pp. 132-33, for minor inscriptions, and pp. 134-35 for *Māda*- in DB main text (alleged interposition of a block of *dahyāva* "which were never under (direct) Median control"). Tuplin quotes Vogelsang just to emphasize that "the alleged Rangaufstieg of Media in royal inscriptions is an illusion", but he gives no alternative explanation). Cf. also n. 27 above.

[31] I have treated this matter many times (Rossi 1981: 166 ff.; 1984 etc.), also in public lectures, symposia and university courses.

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ethnically "Afghan" and consequently speak "Afghan", as you can commonly read in the European press? And to come back to Achaemenid Iran, how could one ignore that in determined cases the designation "Persian" in the Greek sources is not ethnical but political? How could one ignore that Πέρσαι τῆς Ἐπιγονῆς attested in Egypt between 260 BCE and 160 CE is a pseudo-ethnical designation[32]? How to explain (cf. Tuplin 1994: 252 fn. 20, also on the basis of Zadok 1977: 111-12) (1) that "satrap" has a "Persian" form in OP and AE but the "Median" one in AB, AA, Hebrew, Egyptian etc.; (2) that Mithras takes a "Persian" form in AE but a "Median" one in OP and other languages; (3) that Iranian anthroponyms in Babylonia have "Median" forms, which can hardly reflect a consistent "Median" origin? Why not to agree with Windfuhr and Widmer (Windfuhr 2006: 384; Widmer 2005), that the self-designation *Pārsa-* in the royal inscriptions points to membership in the political entity "which certainly included non-Iranian speakers"?

3. Manfred Mayrhofer, who has traced the origin of the views outlining dialectal stratifications within Old Iranian[33], attributes to Friedrich C. Andreas the credit for emphasizing the problem of *Dialektspaltungen im Gebiete des Westiranischen*. Fifteen years before the publication of *Die Tâjîk-Mundarten der Provinz Fârs* by Oscar Mann, where the author, certainly inspired by Andreas, branded OP as "der – oder ein – Dialekt der alten Persis" (Mann 1909: xiii), the relationships between "Median" and OP had already been settled by Heinrich Hübschmann (Hübschmann 1895: 116), who laid the foundations of the "théorie de l'emprunt"[34]: "Durch den

[32] Zadok 1977: 112: "It may be practically rendered as 'Persians born (in Egypt)'. Originally it is thought that it designated the Persian garrisons stationed in Egypt when the country was conquered by the Macedonians [...] Like other ethnica of Ptolemaic Egypt, it became a social, a class designation; among its members there was hardly a person bearing an Iranian name, not to say Persian".

[33] Mayrhofer 1968: 5-8; cf. also Rossi 1981: 155 ff.; Skjærvø 1983: 242-44; Lecoq 1987: 672-75, as well as Grantovskij (see n. 72 below).

[34] This formulation was vulgarized by Pierre Lecoq (1974a: 55: "toutes les grammaires consacrées au vp. [...] ont été conçues en fonction de ce qu'on pourrait appeler la théorie de l'emprunt"). Lecoq's wordings is reminiscent of the "teorija o midijskix zaimstvovanijax v drevnepersidskom" as discussed by Edvin A. Grantovskij (1970: 149-50, reprinted in id. 2007: 168-69; more recently id. 1997: 124 ff.), on the base of Abaev 1945, explicitly quoted by Grantovskij (1970: 149). There Abaev refers to the controversy on the "regularity of phonetic changes", echoed in USSR in the early 1930s on the periodical *Jazyk i myšlenie* (where Abaev had contributed *O fonetičeskom zakone* [= id. 1933], cf. id. 1945: 7). It is indicative that the first, tentative case-study experimented by Abaev to test his innovative idea of *perekrestnye izoglossy* (= id. 1968) has been just that of the so-called "Median elements" in OP. Cf. also n. 62 below.

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Einfluss der daher [scil. *Persis* – AVR] stammenden Achämenidenkönige wurde der Provinzdialekt zur Sprache des persischen Reiches und nahm, indem er sich weit über seine ursprünglichen Grenzen ausdehnte, sicher allerlei Sprachgut aus anderen iranischen Dialekten auf. Am meisten wahrscheinlich, aus dem Medischen. Denn da die Perser als Erben der medischen Herrschaft den Einfluss medischer Kultur erfuhren – sie übernahmen die medischen Heeres –, Hof- und Staatseinrichtungen, sogar die Tracht der Truppen [...], so werden sie auch sprachlich von ihnen beeinflusst worden sein, um so mehr, da Medisch und Altpersisch offenbar nahe verwandte Dialekten waren".

The publication in successive sections of the *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie* allows the reconstruction of the progressive emersion of that picture of the ethno-linguistic situation of ancient Iran which we have found in our handbooks at mid-1900s, but which has prevailed for a relatively short period[35], the span of 35 years or so from 1931 to Gershevitch's *Dialect Variation in Early Persian* (1964), followed within the subsequent ten years by Mayrhofer's *Die Rekonstruktion des Medischen* (1968) and Lecoq's *La langue des inscriptions achémenides* (1974a).

If you look up the Index (*Sachregister*) of the first volume of the *Grundriss der iranischen Sprachen*, you will find that "Medisches Sprachgut" appears five times in all in the book, four of which in the long essay by Paul Horn on New Persian (even if with a meaning slightly different from today's), and once in the *Allgemeine Übersicht über die Dialekte und ihre Gruppirung* printed in the last pages of Wilhelm Geiger's survey of Iranian dialectology. Even if "Medisch" does in fact appear in the *Grundriss* somewhat more than recorded in the Index, the fact remains that the firm believing in the *realia*, typical of the philological approach at Strasburg, advised not to talk so much of a language not directly documented; seventy years later Vasilij I. Abaev, a scholar of analogous formation, will notice with subtle irony, with reference to the "Median language":

> V istorii jazykoznanija trudno najti drugoj primer, kogda by tak široko i svobodno operirovali dannymi jazyka, o kotorom ničego ne izvestno.[36]

[35] "Die Überzeugung von medischen Elementen in der altpersischen Sprache der Achämeniden-Inschriften ist also erst *in unserer Generation* Gemeingut der Forschung geworden", (Mayrhofer 1968: 7); "L'idée que certains mots des inscriptions achéménides pourraient être des emprunts à la langue des Mèdes *est relativement récente*" (Lecoq 1983: 141), emphases added.

[36] Abaev 1968: 251, reprinted in the second volume of *Izbrannye trudy* slightly amended into "o kotorom tak malo izvestno" (id. 1995: 514).

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This is what Geiger writes on this reconstructed "Medisch" in his dialectal survey in the *Grundriss*:

> Die Volksdialekte repräsentiren die verschiedenen localen Mundarten der Provinzen und Landschaften des iranischen Reiches in ihrer modernen Entwickelungsphase. Man liebt es gegenwärtig[37], sie auf die altmedische Sprache zurückzuführen, und spricht demgemäss von Wortformen, welche in der Dialekten vertreten sind, im Gegensatz zu dem Persischen der Schriftsprache, vom medischen Lauterscheinungen u.s.w. Wir werden sehen, dass dies doch nur mit Vorsicht und unter gewissem Vorbehalt geschehen darf. "Medisch" ist zunächst nur ein bequemer Terminus, wenn man die dialektischen Spracherscheinungen von denen der Schriftsprache unterscheiden will; *aber es liegt die Gefahr nahe, in ihm mehr zu begreifen, als wir geschichtlich begründen können*. (Geiger 1898-1901: 413, emphasis added).

Geiger's judicious stand can be complemented with his remark in the initial page of the mentioned *Übersicht* where, complaining about Andreas' delay in publishing his data from the Fârs dialects, the scholar added his hope that when published, the new data could contribute to shed new light on the relationships between OP and Median ("es ist zu hoffen dass sie auch in das Verhältnis des Altpersischen zum Altmedischen manche Aufklärung bringen würden", Geiger 1898-1901: 287).

These words by Geiger are recalled by Christian Bartholomae in his controversy with Ferdinand Justi on the usage of "medisch" instead of "awestisch" to refer to the language of the *Avesta*. Both recommend great care when using "medisch", especially in connection with the controversy on the linguistic character of the Avestan text and ultimately on Zoroaster's homeland, a main problem in the iranological research of the time (as is proved by Geiger's unequivocal statement: "halte ich es für unzulässig, die Awestasprache schon jetzt kurzweg als altmedisch zu bezeichnen und damit die weitere Untersuchung präjudiciren zu wollen"[38]).

[37] Notice *gegenwärtig*, with reference to some unspecified iranological controversy against which Geiger was implicitly taking a critical stand.

[38] Geiger 1898-1901: 414 § 204 n. 3. Some years later Bartholomae (1906: 17) adopts entirely Geiger's statement: "JUSTI hätte sich doch mit GEIGERS Bemerkungen, GIrPh. 1 b.413 f. auseinendersetzen sollen, die ja gerade gegen ihn gerichtet sind"; cf. also *ibid*.: 119-20: "Solang keine zwingenderen, sei es geschichtlichen, sei es sprachlichen Beweise für die Entstehung des Awesta in Medien – Medien in engerem und eigentlichem Sinn genommen – beigebracht sind, als es bis jetzt geschehen ist, werde ich fortfahren, die Sprache des Awesta awestisch zu nennen, um nicht die Vorstellung zu erwecken, als wüßten wir von der Geschichte des Awesta mehr, als wir wirklich wissen". This attitude explains Bartholomae's treatment of "'medisch' σπάκα" in § 76 of *Vorgeschichte der iranischen Sprachen* (id. 1895-1901: 29-30).

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In the German iranological research of early Nineteenth century the extrapolation of possible non-Persian elements in OP was therefore explicitly connected to the question of Zoroaster's homeland, as Bartholomae clearly states in his typical, lapidary style: "Ist die Sprache des Awesta m e d i s c h?" (Bartholomae 1906: 16). This circumspection (or perhaps hesitation[39]) surrounding the question could explain why, in general surveys starting from Horn's (1895-1901) to Tedesco's (1921) and Lentz' (1926) NW-Iranian linguistic features (as opposed to "echt-persisch", or SW-Iranian) are not easily labelled as "Median"[40].

The formulation chosen by A. Meillet in his *Grammaire du vieux perse* represents, in this framework, a prudent opening to the theory of Median elements in OP:

> À examiner les textes vieux perses [...] on a l'impression que les auteurs ne subissent l'influence d'aucune tradition littéraire proprement perse [...] En revanche, le vocabulaire religieux et officiel des inscriptions offre des traces nombreuses de faits étrangers au dialecte perse; et, hors de la Perse, il existait déjà sans doute une littérature, écrite ou non écrite, à laquelle les Perses ont emprunté certaines formes quand ils ont eu à rédiger les inscriptions conservées.

Meillet's idea of searching in a "littérature, écrite ou non écrite" for the explanation of "anomalous" OP forms has set the scene for that conglomeration of linguistic, historical and religious-historical arguments that Bartholomae-Geiger, and probably Andreas, were trying to avoid.

Benveniste adds in his 1931 revision of Meillet's statement[41]:

> En revanche, le vocabulaire religieux et officiel des inscriptions offre des traces nombreuses de faits qui doivent être pris à un dialecte et voisin du

[39] Mayrhofer 1968: 7 mentions in this connection an "Ablehnung in einigen Arbeiten der Jahrhundertwende [...] und in den maßgebenden Werken BARTHOLOMAE": I would not say "refusal" (*Ablehnung*) to hypothesize "Übernahmen aus einem NW-Dialekt ins Altpersische" in general, but rather to resort to the label of "Median language".

[40] Cf. e.g. Horn 1895-1901: 18: "Sind die Worte mit *z* und *s* statt *d* und *h* alle medisch? Diese Vermutung drängt sich fast auf, sie hat aber doch auch ihr Bedenkliches, da dann augenscheinlich vollständige Willkür in der Wahl einer achaemenidisch-persischen oder medischen (und zugleich allgemein ausser-achaemenidischen?) Wortes geherrscht haben musste"; Lentz 1926: 258: "Die bei HORN recht verschwommene Bezeichnung m e d i s c h ist auf *hr* < *θr* nicht anzuwenden. Als medisch können wir nur Lautvertretungen bezeichnen, die sich schon in den Keiliss. als Entlehnungen aus dem N. erweisen". Among the mentioned authors, Lentz is the only taking a clear stand, at least in some cases, for "Medismen" in OP (as remarked by Mayrhofer 1968: 7 fn. 30).

[41] Meillet 1915: 4 (= §§ 7-8); Meillet & Benveniste 1931: 7-8 (= § 8). The theoretical foundations of Benveniste's views on "Median language" are expounded in Benveniste 1931: 72-76.

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> perse et prestigieux. Pour des raisons d'ordre historique, géographique et dialectal, il ne peut s'agir que du mède. Seul l'empire mède [...] pouvait avoir fixé dans l'Iran le début d'une tradition administrative et les premiers termes d'un vocabulaire officiel. De plus, situé au Nord-Ouest, le territoire d'où ont rayonné les Mèdes coïncide en gros avec celui que couvriront les parlers du Nord-Ouest dits arsacides, dont les caractéristiques continuent justement celles du mède [...] Enfin il y a une identité frappante entre les particularités phonétiques des mots étrangers au perse dans les inscriptions et celles des mots transmis comme mèdes par les auteurs grecs.

Benveniste was therefore conscious[42] of the extent to which he was revising the picture as outlined in the first edition of Meillet's *Grammaire*: in the few introductory lines in which he thanks Meillet for the confidence placed in his skills, he defines his task as follows: "j'ai tâché, d'une part, d'incorporer la plus grande somme possible de faits, notamment les inscriptions récemment découvertes, les transcriptions araméennes et les noms propres clairs; de l'autre, de préciser partout les problèmes dialectaux, en introduisant la notion de 'mède'" (Meillet & Benveniste 1931: xviii). Benveniste, acknowledging that the only true alteration with respect to the 1915 edition is the introduction of the notion of "Median", guesses the future importance of the innovation he is operating.

From the few lines added by Benveniste in the revised edition of the *Grammaire du vieux-perse* originates the "théorie de l'emprunt": from the *Grammaire* it will proceed to all major nineteenth-century descriptions of OP: Kent (1953), Hoffmann (1958), Brandenstein-Mayrhofer (1964), Mayrhofer's and Schmitt's essays, till Schmitt's latest study on the subject commented above[43].

4.1. In the *Gershevitch-Day* at Ravenna (2003), I had an opportunity to recall how much in the early 1950s scholars at University of London were interested in the implications of the concept of "linguistically Median" (Rossi 2006: 70 ff.).

Henning himself was deeply interested at that time in the dialects spoken in NW Iran, and with his encouragement, Ehsan Yarshater, a brilliant pupil of Henning, determined to undertake the search for such dialects. Yarshater published in 1969 his doctoral dissertation on southern Tati as first volume of a new Mouton series entitled *Median Dialect Studies*, but the volume remained isolated. Against the "general and vague usage" of calling "Tati" all the Iranian NW dialects, Yarshater claimed in a footnote to the

[42] Cf. Mayrhofer 1968: 7; Rossi 1981: 156; Lecoq 1987: 673 fn. 23: "Ce point est l'oeuvre personnelle de Benveniste".

[43] Lecoq 1987: 673 and fn. 22 mentions Reichelt's (1927: 26) isolated scepticism.

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Introduction to his *Studies* that they should be more correctly denominated "Median dialects" (Yarshater 1969: 17 fn. 1). The dialects studied by Yarshater reflect a linguistic continuum from Azarbayjan southward to the area where the Taleshi dialects join the northernmost Tati ones, with the southernmost Tati ones linking up in their turn with those of the central dialects. The study included in fact modern languages spoken in Greater Media and Media Atropatene; and in it he showed that it had been wrong to suppose that the Iranian dialects spoken within Azarbayjan were recent immigrant ones from other Iranian-speaking regions; on the contrary, they were the true descendants of the dialects spoken in those regions in ancient times. According to a (later) formulation of Yarshater,

> No mass invasion of Iranian population has been reported since Median times to drive out the Median people from their territory and no mass exodus of the Median people is reflected in historical sources. The natural conclusion seems to be that the dialects of the various Median tribes continued to be spoken in Greater Media into Parthian and Sassanian times and continue today, though with decreasing currency. They are now preserved in some parts of Āzerbāyjān, Zanjān and Qazvīn and adjacent areas, and more widely, in a number of villages of Central Persia as well as among the Jewish communities of the region.[44]

4.2. In Ilya Gershevitch, who sat in Yarshater's doctoral committee together with Benveniste and Henning, the working environment at London University amplified a true passion for the question of the Median-Persian relationships in a dialectological sense. In fact, the circumspect formulations on the matter in Henning's essays reveal the prudent attitude of the London school as to the possibilities to better determine which kind of NW Iranian dialect "the language of the Medes" would be[45]. One should wait till 1964,

[44] Yarshater 2002: 441. There Yarshater also outlines (*ibid*.: 440-41) a sketch of the progressive establishment of his vision of the linguistic history of NW Iran and defends the arguments for the usage of "Median dialects" instead of "Central dialects". Windfuhr had criticized this usage moving from the following assumption: since there exist a continuous band of Kurdish dialects from Azarbayjan south along the Zagros, and parallel to this a band of so-called Median dialects, and since both bands cover roughly equal halves of what once was Media, both should be called "Median" dialects (Windfuhr 1975: 457-58).

[45] This is perhaps the meaning of Henning's remark (1958: 98): "wird man P. TEDESCO Recht geben müssen, wenn er betont, dass das altpersische System 'in seiner Gänze' mit dem parthischen identisch ist [...] Das Altpersische ist also unter dem Einfluss *eines nordwestlichen* (*wie man annimmt, medischen*) *Dialekts modifiziertes 'Persisch'* [emphasis added - AVR]". Lecoq 1974a: 56 fn. 8 seems inclined to attribuite to Henning a position not too far from his own, according to which what we call "OP" would be "une langue mixte médo-perse"; however, particularly in his latest essays, Henning seems rather to repeat traditional stereotypes on the Median language (cf. e.g. Henning 1963: 197-98: "As is well

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as Lecoq writes in his *La Langue des inscriptions achéménides*, "pour voir Ilya Gershevitch [...] s'étonner de l'incohérence des emprunts faits par le vieux-perse au mède" (Lecoq 1974a: 55-56).

In his communication to the Philological Society intitled *Dialect Variation in Early Persian*, Gershevitch analysed many OP words which had been declared to be non-Persian intruders:

> The Persian word for "king", *šāh*, is not proper Persian, say the comparative grammarians, because the form to be expected in proper Persian would be **šāš*; the word for "town", *šahr*, which at an early period meant "kingdom", ought to have been **šas*; instead of Pers. *sang* "stone" one expects **hang*; instead of *buzurg* "big" **buhurg*; instead of *asp* "horse" **as*; instead of *āsmān* "sky" **āhmān*; and even instead of *Fārs* "Persian" **Pāhl*.
> All these words, and very many others conveying the most ordinary meanings, disagree with one or another rule of what is believed to be the phonology of proper Persian, but agree with what little is known, or can be inferred, about Median phonology. They are accordingly declared Median. And they are declared Median, rather than belonging to some other non-Persic language, for instance Avestan, which in respect of the Old Iranian antecedents of these words behaves like Median, because the ancestors of some of them occur in a supposedly non-Persic form already in Old Persian, at a time, about 520 B.C., when the Persians, having not long before taken over from the Medians a vast empire, would be likely to have been influenced by the administrative, as well as generally cultural vocabulary of the Medes. (Gershevitch 1965: 1).

Why was the OP word for "king", *xšāyaθya-*, taken from Median when the word for "kingdom" was retained in its proper OP form, *xšaṣṣa*? Why did the ancient Persians adopt the Median word for "great", *vaẓṛka-*, but retain their own (*echtpersisch*) word for "greatest", *maθišta-*? Why OP speakers should have borrowed the Median word for "sky", *āsmān-*? And so on.

At the end of a historical and linguistic demonstration too complex to be summarised here, Gershevitch was able to explain several aspects of phonological variability and most of the words commonly considered as markers of Median in OP (*āsmāna-* "sky", *vaẓṛka-* "great", *zūrah-* "deceit", *aθanga-* "stone", *xšāyaθya-* "king", *xšaṣṣa-* "kingdom" etc.) as due to the contemporary presence in the texts of different "Persian dialect forms" (i.e. a standard form of OP and an OP dialect different from the standard language). The variance *d* ~ *z* in Elamite doublets of a same anthroponym

known, the administrative vocabulary of Old Persian was largely borrowed from Median. It is, therefore, likely that *ganza-* originated in Media. [...] We may, therefore, add the metathesis *–zn-* > *-nz-* to the short list of special features of the ancient Median language").

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(e.g. *kan-da-ba-ra ~ kan-za-ba-ra*) was explained with the following, revolutionary assumption:

> *s* and *z* were the regular antevocalic outcome of the IE palatals not only in Median, but also in Old Persian, but from about the beginning of the Achaemenian period an optional realisation of *s* as *θ*, and of *z* as *δ*, began to assert itself. (*ibid*.: 13).

It was the first time that a possible dialectal inner-Persian differentiation was expressed clearly as opposed to the presence in OP of non-Persian elements, if you leave out an isolated reference in a footnote of Henning's early essay *Das Verbum des Mittelpersischen der Turfanfragmente*[46]. According to Gershevitch, only very few "reputedly Median features of OP" did "prove Median provenance": (1) "the presence of *sp* from Indo-Iranian *św*", (2) "*f* from proto-Iranian *hw* (as in *farnah*-)", (3) "*nz* from *zn* (as in **ganza*-)", (4) "post-vocalic *t* at the end of first compound-terms (as in **Zarat-uštra*- [...])" (Gershevitch 1965: 28).

And, what is more, the stress is put for the first time on features connected to individual repertoires and on linguistic arguments *stricto sensu*, in contrast to the considerations of a naive sociolinguistics nature till then circulated by scholars[47]:

> May not also OP *asman*- "sky", *vazṛka*- "great", and *zūrah*- "deceit", or the MP ancestors of MP *sang* "stone", *zādag* "son", and *šahr* "kingdom", have been Median loanwords? Most scholars, I suppose, would answer this question in the affirmative, on the assumption that the superiority of Median culture, combined with the presence among the Persians of any number of Medes, would suffice to bring about a fluctuation in Persian usage between proper Persian words and their Median equivalents. If, however, one believes that such a fluctuation would not have arisen unless an additional, specifically linguistic cause had been at work, the answer will be that the appropriation by the Persian language of Med. *aspa*- and *vispa*- would be more easily understandable if it were true that **asanga*- and **xšaθra*- were original Persian forms which continued to be used beside their new realizations as *aθanga*- and *xšaṣṣa*-. For, provided that Median was a language familiar to most Persians at least at Court, the fact that the Median

[46] Henning 1933: 201 fn. 1. Gershevitch insists several times on Henning's position regarding inner-OP varieties (cf. e.g. Gershevitch 1965: 4: "This [...] is the Persian dialect differentiation envisaged by Henning"; "Henning's theory seems plausible enough" etc.); this may reflect some statement by Henning in his everyday teaching.

[47] E.g. the alleged "célébrité des chevaux mèdes" to explain *-sp*- instead of *-s*- in the term for "horse": "'La célébrité des chevaux mèdes' can hardly by itself have introduced *aspa*- into the Persian vocabulary, as Meillet and Benveniste assumed (*Grammaire du vieux-perse*, p. 9). In any case such an explanation would not be applicable to *vispa*-" (*ibid*.: 18 fn. 1).

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> forms **asanga-* and **xšaθra-*, while contrasting with the exclusively Persian variants *aθanga-* and *xšaṣṣa-*, were legitimate also in Persian, would lend an air of legitimacy to the Median pronunciation *aspa-* of what in proper Persian sounded *asa-*, even though *this* pronunciation had been exclusively Median to start with. (*ibid*.: 17-18).

Notwithstanding the extreme subtlety of Gershevitch's arguments, I would not agree completely with Lecoq's formulation: "Paradoxalement, la solution proposée par Gershevitch aboutit presque à l'élimination du mède" (Lecoq 1974a: 55). As a matter of fact, Gershevitch does not deny the existence of a linguistic phase which we can (a posteriori) describe as Median, and which could be perceived as Median by the Achaemenid speakers[48], with its particular (morpho-)phonemic characteristics[49]; he only stresses the need to organize the relationships between the two varieties into the framework of bilingualism (one should remark that Gershevitch, while never using *the term* "bilingualism", resorts very frequently to the concept of "Medo-Persian" or "Perso-Median", especially in his late essays; cf. e.g. Gershevitch 1970: 82; 1979: 148; 1996: 67).

The *Vortrag* published by Mayrhofer in support of "l'existence menaçée de la langue mède" (Lecoq 1974a: 56) represents a reasoned revival of the "théorie de l'emprunt", conceived without taking things to extremes[50], and supported by a modern and systematic approach in terms of general linguistic theory. At the end of the 1960s, Mayrhofer's essay is the only publication where the OP-Median question is treated with resort to terms from modern linguistics, such as "phonological systems", "allophonic variants", "conditioned variants" etc.

Even Gershevitch, with his innovative concept of "dialect variation", could not escape Mayrhofer's criticism: the major objection was that he had mixed up different phonological levels[51]. The great question outlining in those years, when new trends were emerging both in general linguistics and in dialectology, was exactly the theoretical status of the phonemic system of

[48] Cf. Gershevitch 1965: 18: "Median was a language familiar to most Persians at least at Court".

[49] Among morpho-phonemic features one should classify the compound-vowel elision listed by Gershevitch 1988: 74 and fn. 19 among the "Median" features (already hinted at in Gershevitch 1965: 28).

[50] Mayrhofer 1968: 5: "in der Literatur keine volle Einigkeit: Von der allzu unbedenklichen Etikettierung jeder Einzelheit als 'medisch', die sich in die altpersische Lautgeschichte nicht zu fügen scheint [...], bis zu einem geistvollen, aber verfehlten Versuch, alle sonstigen Medismen als altpersische Dialektvarianten zu deuten".

[51] Mayrhofer 1968: 16 fn. 69: "leidet an die Unschärfe, mit der er an Stellen wie dieser von 'optional' und 'interchangeable realizations', also offenbar freier allophonischer Variation in einem einheitlichen System, andererseits meist von 'Dialektvarianten' spricht".

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a "dialect" as contrasted with that of a "language", and, as a correlate to this, the position of varieties within single repertoires; consequently, it is hardly surprising that Gershevitch's reply was centred just on the concepts of "variety" and "repertoire"[52].

However, Mayrhofer's extra-linguistic arguments are not much different from those traditionally advanced by the supporters of the "theory of borrowing": (1) the Medes are "die Schöpfer der ersten iranischen Reichsbildung [...] womit die Übernahme der Benennungen"; (2) "Namen von Medern der Achämenidenzeit [...] lassen die nämlichen Lautgesetzte erkennen, die jenes iranische, aber nichtpersische Wortgut zeigt, das in die Achämenideninschriften aus einer Sprache höheren Prestiges übernommen worden ist"; (3) "Die Lage Mediens und der Persis spiegelt sich in einer dialektgeographischen Verteilung der jüngeren iranischen Sprachen wider, die zu den Unterschieden stimmt, welche zwischen Altpersisch und erschlossen Medisch bestehen" (Mayrhofer 1968: 3).

4.3. Mayrhofer and Gershevitch seem to act in two parallel worlds which do not communicate. To Gershevitch, who always had an eye to originality in innovation, also in his terminology, one owes, in the controversy on the Median language, the introduction into Iranian linguistics of the term (linguistic) *variety*. Most probably is just from *Dialect Variation* (1964) that Abaev adapted his *dialektnaja pestrota* as applied to the "Median" in his short "*Midijskie*" *èlementy v persidskom* (where the adjective *midijskij* was printed in inverted commas, as Abaev used to do). In it, Gershevitch is explicitly mentioned as an "inspirer", but no mention is made of his *Dialect variation*, so we are left with a doubt; certainly in this short statement Abaev's attitude towards the Median language appears more Gershevitchian than Gershevitch himself[53].

As for Mayrhofer, since he inclined to depict OP as a definite system, he naturally conceived the Median language as a similar entity, interacting with OP "system to system" and leaving in it as remnants "nicht echt-ap. Wörter und Namen"[54]. On the whole, the scientific community sided with

[52] Gershevitch 1970: 83-84. The arguments put forward by the two scholars are analysed in Rossi 1981: 171-72.

[53] As remarked above (cf. fn. 49), Abaev's critical stand against the possibility to reconstruct a Median language – though reiterated on many occasions – passed totally unnoticed. I underlined this circumstance in an inaugural speech read on my behalf by V.M. Gusalov at Vladikavkaz' Conference in October 1990, on the occasion of Abaev's 90th birthday.

[54] Cf. Hoffmann 1958: 4. In *Onomastica persepolitana* (1973: 300-304) Mayrhofer admits the possibility of "weitere iranische Dialekte der Achämenidenzeit" in addition to Median; cf. already Hoffmann 1958: 4: "Allerdings könnten ihrer Lautgestalt nach die meisten nicht echt-ap. Wörter und Namen auch anderen Dialekten angehören, eine sicher medische Besonderheit ist jedoch in dem Wandel von iran. *hu̯* (ap. *uv* aw. x^v) zu *f* fassbar".

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Mayrhofer: "Gershevitch probably stands alone with his view (TPS 1964, 23f.) that *xšāyaθya* is a normal Persian form", will remark somewhat later Szemerényi commenting on Benveniste's latest opinion on the matter[55].

5. A few years later David N. MacKenzie joined the Gershevitch-Mayrhofer controversy, objecting to some assumptions contained in Gershevitch's *Dialect Variation*. From the mentioned *Island-Bay and the Lion*, I will quote a few sentences just to give an idea of the angry tone used by Gershevitch with regard to MacKenzie's remarks to his theory: "My expectation of this reality was dismissed, with Mayrhofer's warm approval [...] by MacKenzie"; "From MacKenzie's quoting [...] an innocent reader might suppose me to have said that no Pahl. *s* is pseudo-historical"; "MacKenzie's also doubts, again with Mayrhofer's approval, the one case of MP initial *h* < *θw* which I had been able to think of" (Gershevitch 1970: 88 and fn. 9).

To fully appreciate the particulars of this controversy within the controversy, one should regard another side of the question, *viz*. that Gershevitch in different occasions had supported Vladimir Minorsky's ethno-geographical identification according to which the present-day Kurds are the descendants of the ancient Medes (Minorsky 1940: 146 ff.). Many objections had been raised against Minorsky's proposal, but Gershevitch was convinced (Gershevitch 1992: 167 ff.) that the lack of documentation on the Median language could paradoxically transform his hint into an incontrovertible assumption. The only "factual ground", according to Gershevitch, on which one may impugn Minorsky's identification "will have to be the ethnical name 'Kurd', which clearly is no descendant of Old Persian *Māda* 'Median'": but since there is no overlap of historical Medes with modern Kurds, one may think of circumstances where a given language continues to be spoken under a different name outside its country of origin[56].

Having refuted Minorsky's theory, MacKenzie had in the meantime outlined (cf. MacKenzie 1961) a different picture of the evolution of NW Iranian, according to which Kurdish paralleled the evolution of Persian and therefore represented an early splitting from the linguistic subgroup of Median.

The divergence between the two visions peaked when MacKenzie read

[55] Szemerényi 1975: 314 and fn. 2, where Benveniste 1969/2: 18-19 is quoted. On this consensus cf. Mayrhofer 1973: 298-99 fn. 107; a rejoinder to criticism as expressed in Skjærvø 1984 is in Yarshater 1989: 244.

[56] Gershevitch 1992: 169: "It is therefore not difficult to accept that [...] the displaced speakers of the Median language came to acquire, and eventually to treat as their own, the collective name 'Kurd', of which the origin eludes us".

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Gershevitch's ethno-linguistic reconstruction in the printed version of his *Lincei* lecture on *Linguistic geography and historical linguistics*[57].

MacKenzie, as we know from the *Addenda et corrigenda* to *The Origins of Kurdish* (MacKenzie 1999: 675-76), saw in the *Lincei* paper an attempt by Gershevitch to dispose of the hypotheses expressed in his 1961 article. Here are MacKenzie's comments on Gershevitch's arguments:

> First he mentions the no longer tenable ascription to Median of a development of *hw-* to *f-* [...]. Secondly he insinuates – no more – that the known name of the capital **Hangmatāna-* is not Median in form, but Old Persian. He then feels free to suggest [...], with typically convoluted arguments, that the Kurds, since they patently do not inhabit any part of the historical Media, are simply the "descendants of Medes left stranded, after the surrender of Ecbatana to Cyrus, in the alloglot or underpopulated territories of Asia Minor where as conquerors or adventurers they had settled during the height of Median power", who later "as a result of vicissitudes unmentioned in our sources, [...] came to acquire, and eventually treat as their own, the collective name 'Kurds', of which the origin eludes us". This remarkable theory, supported by no more than a tendentious, albeit quite irrelevant, reference to V.L. Minorsky's undoubted status as "a scholar of rare wisdom and expertise in matters of Western Iranian historical geography", is then buttressed by an equal romantic explanation for the Kurds, as exile Medes under Scythian hegemony [...] All this ignores so much other evidence, both phonological and non-linguistic, that it leaves one wondering if it was ever meant to be taken seriously, or merely as a *jeu d'esprit*.

6. For the particulars of MacKenzie's rebuttal to Gershevitch I will refer the reader to the mentioned *Addenda*; personally, I incline to separate Kurdish from the "Median"(-Central) band, and connect it to the Middle Persian – New Persian line, within an originarious South Iranian of which Persian could represent an "early regional split"[58].

What I would like to stress here is that the two linguistic corns of the "question of the Medes" (Median language in Iron Age Iran ~ modern Median dialects) have generated overlapping theories throughout the

[57] The lecture was read on 27 march 1991 at the Lincei Academy, Rome, in the framework of an international conference on the position of historical linguistics among the linguistic disciplines, and published in the series *Atti dei Convegni Lincei* less than a year later.

[58] Cf. Windfuhr 1975; 1996: 365; cf. also Lecoq 1989: 259-61. One should remark however that the data from the genetic approach quoted in Windfuhr 2006: 383 (this approach according to the author "may serve to strengthen assumptions of archaic patterns of relationships and of migrations when based on independent, comparative-historical linguistic argument") indicate separation of Iranian-speakers into three genetically distinct clusters, the first of which, in West Iran (Kurdish and Caspian), seems in contradiction with both Windfuhr's two-bands and Lecoq's Kurdo-Karmanian vs Medo-Caspian grouping.

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twentieth century, but these have been only rarely taken up by scholars who possessed sufficient passion and competence to make significant advances both at the dialectological and the historico-linguistical levels.

Combining these levels, one suddenly realizes that the main objection to the singling out of specifically "Median" phonological elements remains the same already advanced many years ago by Geiger and Bartholomae: "non-Persian" elements identified as "Median" are also found in linguistic areas which cannot be defined "Median" neither geographically, nor dialectologically ("le seul trait phonétique indubitablement mède que nous connaissions [...] *sp* < **ḱw* i.eur., attesté dans le mot *spaka* "chien" rapporté par Hérodote comme mède [...] est commun à presque tous les dialectes iraniens" [Skjærvø 1983: 250]; "il est impossibile de prouver que *farnah* soit un mot originellement mède et *a fortiori* que ce soit un mot contenant une isoglosse exclusivement mède" [*ibid*.: 251]; etc.).

The scrutiny of the linguistic composition of modern "Median" territories entails a relevant theoretical problem, i.e. the judgment on the status given at every time to the dialectal stratification deposited within each linguistic system (= in the modern world, the single national languages). Abaev considers the relevant amount of dialectal variety (*bol'šaja dialektnaja pestrota*) in the modern "Median" region as a direct testimony of the linguistic variety of ancient Media (*o jazykovoj pestrote drevnej Midii*). What our position should be – Abaev wonders – with an *äspä*/*esba*/*esbâ* "dog" documented for Semnani, and a *sipa* "dog" documented for Bajalani[59], both from languages spoken in regions belonging to old Media, where "dog" was σπάκα? "Kakuju iz ètix form sleduet rassmatrivat′ kak 'čisto medijskuju' ('echtmedisch')? I na kakom osnovanii? Ne estestvennee li dumat′, čto 'čisto medijskoe' sostojanie – takaja že fikcija, kak 'čisto persidskoe', i čto na territorii Midii nikogda ne bylo edinogo i monolitnogo midijskogo jazyka, a bylo, kak i sejčas, množestvo dialektov i govorov s perekreščivajuščimisja izoglossami?".

In this way Abaev traces the problem of so-called "Median borrowings" in OP back to the more general one of the presence of several layers (or, in Abaev's terms, several "norms"[60]) in every single "état de langue", restricting the role of interference between different languages:

[59] Semnani: Christensen 1915 s.v. (*äspä*), Sotude 1963 s.v. (*esba*/*esbâ*); Bajalani: MacKenzie 1956: 435.

[60] The relationship existing in Abaev's views between "état de langue" and "variety" (*pestrota*) is not completely clear: cf. e.g. "v ljubom dialekte mogut sosuščestvovat′ ne odna, a neskol′ko norm" (Abaev 1968: 248) versus "na territorii Midii nikogda ne bylo edinogo i monolitnogo midijskogo jazyka, a bylo, kak i sejčas, množestvo dialektov i govorov s perekreščivajuščimisja izoglossami" (*ibid*.: 251). "Norma" is a technical term with complex semantical content in Soviet linguistics, cf. Axmanova 1966: 270-71.

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> tak nazyvaemye “midijskie” èlementy v persidskom ne javljajutsja dlja persidskogo čužimi, usvoennymi izvne. Oni organičeski vxodili v tkan′ samogo persidskogo jazyka. Èta tkan′ nikogda ne byla odnocvetnoj (Abaev 1968: 252).[61]

7. All this takes us back to the extra-linguistic implications of the question.

To resort to Lecoq’s wording,

> Nous ne possedont aucun texte écrit en mède [...] nous restituons cette langue lorsque, dans les inscriptions, nous rencontrons des mots dont la phonétique ne correspond pas à celle du perse. Mais ces mots pourraient tout aussi bien appartenir à d’autres dialectes iraniens. La raison qui nous permet de les attribuer au mède est qu’ils apparaissent dans des formules officielles, stéréotypées, qui n’ont pu être empruntées par les Perse qu’aux Mèdes. (Lecoq 1987: 674).

Eduard Meyer has outlined in his *Geschichte des Altertums* the foundations of ancient historiography, in a period in which the history of ancient Near Eastern had hardly started to rid itself of the four-kingdom schema according to the formulation of the Book of Daniel (2, 31-35; 2, 37-45; 7, 4-14; 7, 19-27). Meyer’s aversion for the idea of the “succession of empires” and his obsessive insistence on a “universalizing” vision is clearly stated in the final pages of his methodological introduction to the *Geschichte*:

> Im Altertum selbst hat diese Auffassung vielfache, ja sogar vorwiegende Vertretung gefunden. Schon der Anordnung Herodots liegt sie zu Grunde: systematischer tritt sie dann vor allem bei Ephoros, Polybios, Posidonios hervor [...] Ebenso hat es in der Neuzeit, auch nachdem das überlieferte Schema der Chroniken und der vier Weltreiche Daniels abgestreift war, an den derartigen Versuchen nicht gefehlt. (Meyer 1910^{3}: 249-50).

[61] Abaev refers here to an earlier stand on the matter (“Èty i drugie soobraženija pobudili menja ešče dvadcat′ let nazad vyskazat′ ubeždenie, čto tak nazyvaemye ‘midijskie’ èlementy v persidskom ne javljajutsja dlja persidskogo čužimi, usvoennymi izvne”; cf. Abaev 1945 = 1949: 139-43); also Abaev, Melikišvili & Dandamaev (1958: 167) had defined the language of the Achaemenid inscriptions “vklad iz različnyx iranskix dialektov”. On Abaev and the “theory of borrowing” cf. Rossi 1981: 175 ff.; more recently on this theory cf. Briant 2003: 25: “the theory of linguistic borrowings remains quite disputable. It proceeds from an underlying hypothesis – the assumption that the dialect words found in the vocabulary of the Old Persian inscriptions come from a Median language [...] By reasoning that might be considered circular, Median has been reconstructed on the basis of Persian borrowings, themselves reconstructed”; *ibid*.: 879: “The theory of Medo-Persian linguistic inheritance is found already in Meillet and Benveniste 1931 [...] The theory was strongly challenged by Skjærvø [...] as well as by Lecoq”.

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Notwithstanding Meyer's *abgestreift*, the "succession of empires" was still well established in nineteenth-century historiography, as can be judged from the most authoritative treatment then available for ancient Near Eastern history, i.e. George Rawlinson's *The five Great Monarchies* (Chaldæa, Assyria, Babylon, Media, Persia). Rawlinson's five monarchies became subsequently six with the volume on Parthian history (*The six Great Monarchies*, 1872) and were republished in 1880, with a new essay on Sassanian history, as *The seven Great Monarchies*[62].

The idea of the "succession of empires" as derived from the Book of Daniel and from the Greco-Roman tradition is particularly important for the reconstruction of the origin of Achaemenid power according to ideas inherited by modern scholars. Rightly Josef Wiesehöfer, perhaps the most concerned among iranologists with the persistence of traditional stereotypes in modern historiography, has stressed that only a persisting prejudice may justify that the three-kingdom sequence (Assyria, Media, Persia) has normally been explained as a component of the official Achaemenid view of the history, intended to underline the legitimacy of Persia as the heir to the preceding empires of the Near East.

On the contrary, we have all reasons to believe that a Median imperial system never existed, and even less do we find any evidence in the royal Achaemenid ideology for the idea that the Persian kings regarded themselves as successors to a dynasty of Median kings who would have been their inspirers as for form of state, bureaucracy, metaphors of power and the like[63].

Some time after the end of the Achaemenid rule, Herodotus' "three-kingdom" model must have become – according to Wiesehöfer's reconstruction which I cannot tell in detail here but which I widely share – a "four-kingdom" schema, and lastly, around the first century BCE, the

[62] Rawlinson 1880. The volume dedicated to Achaemenid Persia appeared autonomously as Rawlinson 1867. On the authoritativeness of Rawlinson till the first decades of 1900 cf. Briant 2005: 265-66.

[63] Wiesehöfer (2003: 392 and fn. 10) ironically remarks that the only characterization of "Median royal figures" to be found in the Achaemenid inscriptions would be in the prisoners labels at Bisotun, commenting on the figures of Fravartiš (DB/OPe) and Ciçantaxma (DB/OPg): both are defined *xšāyaθya-* "king" (or possibly "tribal chieftains") and "liars": consequently the Achaemenids/Darius viewed the Median kings – in the few occasions in which they were object of the royal discourse – only as rebel chieftains and liars. As far as I know, in recent times only Metzler (1975; 1977: 287, on him cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1994: 55 without comments, and Tuplin 1994: 253 (ii) with explicit criticism), Kratz (1991: 197-212, cf. Wiesehöfer 2003: 392 fn. 3) and Ladynin (2005: 155-56) have pointed to the Achaemenids in need of imperial predecessors as the responsible for the "construction" of a Median empire in ancient historiographic traditions.

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Roman historiographers would have extended the Seleucid "four-kingdom" schema into a "five-kingdom" one, with Rome as its last component[64].

The Herodotean "three-kingdom" sequence is clearly based on that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream narrated in the Book of Daniel, with minor changes due to Jewish interpretation (Babylonian instead of Assyrians etc). I will tell incidentally that Meyer, rather prudent on the exploitation of biblical sources for the reconstruction of Achaemenid history, quotes the Book of Daniel only in another passage of his book[65], stating "selbst in die Visionen Daniels hat sich eine Anzahl echt persischer Amtstitel gerettet" (Meyer 1939[3]: 4), without any further reference to the sequel of empires, appearing in Meyer's *Geschichte* in the mentioned passage of his methodological introduction[66].

On the nature of the "Median power", and consequently on the prominent question of the Achaemenid origins, Meyer, as often does, exhibits a mix of caution and uncritical assent to commonplaces of the historiography of his times. However, even if it is not always easy to distinguish between original views of the author and additions by Hans Erich Stier, the editor of Meyer's manuscript, we are left with the conviction that the scholar remained on the whole prisoner of the cyclic schema "fall of a previous power owing to migratory invasions" → "establishment of a new power" → "fall of the new power owing to new migratory invasions", which is ultimately a modern reshape of the schema of the Herodotean and biblical sequence of kings.

In any case, Meyer's stand about the so-called Median heritage in the Achaemenid state was of capital importance to all subsequent historiography. Meyer is the first to emphasize that the Medes should have a peculiar position in the imperial structure of the Achaemenid dynasty: while political entities such as Babylonia, Egypt, Armenia, Bactriana would only represent "Schatten eines ehemals selbständigen Staats", the Median state "lebt [...] weiter [...] umgewandelt in das Perserreich" (Meyer 1939[3]: 24).

Today we are well aware that practically all the topics[67] advanced by Meyer in support of his construction can be interpreted in a different

[64] The details are in Wiesehöfer 2003.

[65] If one relies on the (uneven) indexes compiled by the editor Hans Erich Stier.

[66] Cf. p. 310 above.

[67] Meyer's arguments are as follows: "nehmen die Meder im Reich die nächste Stellung nach den Persern ein [...] Aus Persien und Medern besteht die Kerntruppe des Heers, ihnen werden die Reichsbeamten entnommen (Xen. Cyr. IV 2, 8), unter Kyros und Darius erscheinen Meder in den höchsten Vertrauensstellen an der Spitze der Heere. Die königliche Tracht und die Ordnung des Hofs hat Kyros von den Medern übernommen, Egbatana wird eine der Residenzen des Großkonigs" (*ibid*.).

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way[68]; but his perspectives as a whole have remained deeply-rooted in the views of most scholars. Since, according to the Greek sources, the Persians had taken – Meyer says: "entlehnt" – from the Medians state, religion and culture, we should have to reconstruct a Median state perfectly symmetrical to the Achaemenid one, and try to fill in some way all the gaps present in the documentation: the randomness of archaeological finds would have hampered the discovery of the Median palatial systems[69]; the superposition of modern Hamadan on the Median capital, Ecbatana, would have hampered the location of the city; written documentation of Median power would not have emerged either because written on the walls of untraced buildings or because of the non-existence of any form of Iranian writing before 522 BCE, and so on.

8. I will not enter into details here about the "Median palatial systems" and the so-called "archaeology of the Medes", which remains – together with the so-called "Median art" – one of the most elusive subjects of Iron Age Iran. I will however observe with satisfaction that while in the early 1980s the "minimalist" positions of Bruno Genito in archaeology[70] and of the present writer in linguistics were rather isolated[71], after Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg's *Was there ever a Median Empire?* (Groningen 1985)[72] we assist to a marked increase of critical stands (Helm, Brown, Malekzadeh, Kienast, Rollinger, Medvedskaya, Imanpour, Liverani, Wiesehöfer, Henkelmann[73]), and the discussion has restarted with a clean slate, disregarding old stereotypes and preconceptions.

[68] See Brown, Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Rollinger, Wiesehöfer, Liverani quoted in this work; and Briant 2002: 879-80 for a recent bibliographic review.

[69] According to a different view, the Median rulers would never have built palaces because of the short time of their supremacy.

[70] Genito 1986 (and subsequent literature quoted in Genito 2005).

[71] The only other critical statements available were Abaev's and Grantovskij's quoted above, for the "Median language", and the papers by Oscar Muscarella denouncing the host of so-called "Median artifacts" entering the antiquity market since mid-nineteenth century (cf. Muscarella 1987 and further articles quoted in Genito 2005; cf. also the prudent position of Calmeyer 1987: 568: "The philological facts have sometimes been brought into an archaeological context, often assuming that artifacts simply mirror migrations"). The only recent attempt to revitalize the "Median art" seems to be Razmjou 2005 ("the existence of any sort of Median art has been denied [...] The result has been that during the last 25 years the subject has been effectively closed for academic discussions. Only now are some young scholars reconsidering the question", Curtis 2005: 119 with reference to Razmjou 2005).

[72] Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988; and subsequently ead. 1994, 1995.

[73] Helm 1981; Brown 1986, 1988; Malekzadeh 1997; Kienast 1999; Rollinger 1999, 2005, in press; Medvedskaya 2002 (and previous articles quoted in Genito 2005); Imanpour 2002-2003; Liverani 2003; Wiesehöfer 2003; Henkelmann 2003.

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Modern archaeological activity in the core area of ancient Media has been particularly intensive in the years 1960s to 1980s, when excavations at Godin Tepe, Tepe Nuš-e Jān and Tepe Bābā Jān have been carried out and/or set up. At Tepe Nuš-e Jān, *c*. 60 km. south of Hamadan, the most important complex among those fitting into the current archaeological reconstruction of the "Median" period in central Zagros was progressively excavated.

The two outstanding excavators of Tepe Nuš-e Jān, David Stronach and Michael Roaf, have related on many occasions how around 1965, after a "longstanding neglect of the material remains of the Medes", in a situation where almost nothing was known of the "diagnostic markers of the Median period", one particular kind of site was chosen to experiment a correlation of the scanty information available with data extracted from an excavation situated in a central area of the historical Media:

> One which would lie [...] quite close to Hamadan; [...] one which would be, at least in the main, a one-period site; and one which would contain significant materials datable to the period between 750 and 550 BC. (Stronach & Roaf 2007: 44).

When, more than forty years after, the two scholars strive to evaluate the impact of the archaeological discoveries on the historical reconstruction of Media around the first half of the first millennium BCE, they have to admit in all fairness that, even if one would like "[...] to be able to [...] associate the major building events at Tepe Nush-i Jan with events in Median history; to link the establishment of the site [...] with a possible unification of Media or to connect the later closure of individual buildings with an eventual centralisation of authority in the Median capital, Ecbatana", "the truth [...] is [...] that the date and even the historicity of such 'events' is still in dispute [...] and that, even if this were not so, there is still a long way to go before the pottery from the site – our single most sensitive chronological index – can begin to be used to point to narrow, as opposed to relatively broad, intervals of time"[74].

The final chapter in Stronach & Roaf 2007 (pp. 203-18) illustrates how the picture emerging from the excavations does not fit at all the traditional reconstruction of the "Median" period of the history of NW Iran; to their *Conclusions* I refer the reader for further details.

I will restrict myself to reproduce the wording by which Stronach and Roaf comment their fig. 11.10 (see below), i.e. the chart where absolute and relative chronologies of the three sites of Nuš-e Jān, Bābā Jān and Godin Tepe are compared in parallel columns:

[74] *Ibid*.: 58. Cf. also *ibid*.: 57: "in the present state of our knowledge of the archaeology of Iron Age Iran we are not able to date any of the excavated structures with certainty to within a hundred years".

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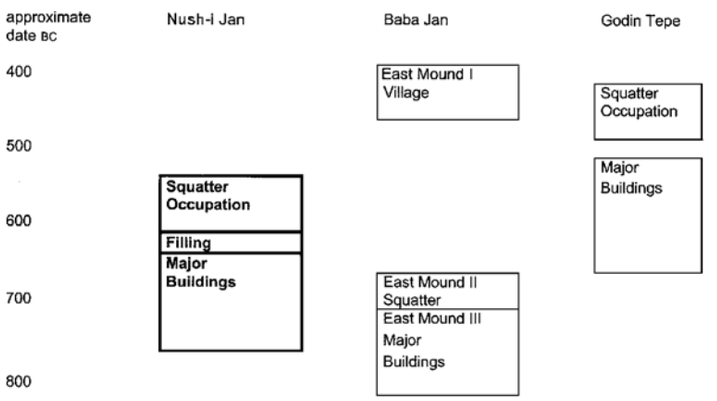

> No doubt further excavations in west central Iran will eventually lead to a refinement of the pottery chronology, and developments in radiocarbon and dendrochronological methods may also enable samples from Nush-i Jan to be more accurately dated, but at the moment we have to confess that it is impossible to provide more than an approximate date for the construction and use of the Median buildings at Nush-i Jan.

The earliest construction "may well have taken place in the 8th century BC", and the dates of the beginning and end of the Filling "probably" lie into the second half of the 8th century BCE or at the beginning of the 6th century; "the duration of the Filling and its chronological relationship with Cyaxares' successful campaigns in Assyria remain matters for debate"; "The Squatter Occupation followed almost immediately after it was decided to abandon the Filling and may have lasted about 75 years [...] The main part of the Squatter Occupation seems to date to the post-Assyrian and pre-Achaemenid period [...] with the end of the Squatter Occupation possibly coinciding (perhaps a generation earlier or later) with the incorporation of Media into the Persian kingdom in the mid 6th century BC" (*ibid*.: 217).

The authors catch the reader's attention on the "curious" fact that the Squatter Occupation at Nuš-e Jān should coincide "with the period which is generally thought to have been that of the Median Empire". However, out of respect for the traditional views, they qualify the point as follows:

> This observation has been used to argue against the existence of a united Median state at this period (Liverani 2003), despite the fact that it is often inappropriate to generalise from a single excavation and that the major "Median" buildings both at Godin Tepe and at Tepe Ozbaki seem to have been in use at this time. Other evidence, although by no means not conclusive, supports the view that a Median state exerted influence from

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> Central Anatolia to north-east Iran in the first half of the 6th century BC (Roaf 2003, Stronach 2003). Amongst such indications we would note the familiarity of Greeks, Jews and Egyptians with the Medes which would be unlikely if they were not important actors on the political stage before the rise of the Persians and the fact that Cyrus after his defeat of the Medes was in a position to attack Lydia without apparently having to spend time subduing independent states between central western Iran and western Anatolia.[75]

Once again, by a circular argument, one is leaded to interpret the archaeological evidence which should cast new light on the "Median period" of Iron Age Iran, exactly through those sources which for long time have represented the only means for our understanding of the antiquity, and in recent times many scholars have considered with mounting suspicions.

9. Seen from an ancient Near Eastern perspective, Benveniste's "mède" is a true reappearance of the "language of the Medes", a problem receded from the foreground since when the usage of "Median" in connection with the "second language" of the Royal inscriptions was banned[76]. The reintroduction of the "Median language" as a true language into the iranological discourse was proposed by Benveniste, captivated by the (then) fresh interpretations of the Neo-Assyrian chronicle passages[77] where the occurrence of the term *Mada* (toponym, ethnonym and ethno-tribal epithet) seemed to fit perfectly the "providential" role assigned to the Medes ever since Herodotean times. A series of elements of various nature seemed to support a historical framework where Medes and Persians were Indo-European populations (as proved by most of their anthroponyms), presumably arrived on the Iranian plateau in the first half of the first

[75] *Ibid*.: 217 fn. 16. For a different standing on the (reduced) influence exerted by a "Median federation" on eastern Anatolia cf. Rollinger 2003.

[76] From Weisbach 1890: 11-22 (= § B: *Ist die Sprache der Achämenideninschriften 2. Art irgendwie "medisch" zu nennen?*) one gets the idea of a controversy still in progress; there the motivations for the former identification of the "second language" of the Royal Achaemenid inscriptions as "Median" are summarized.

[77] On the sensation created by Meyer's interpretation of the Iranian onomastica in the Neo-Assyrian chronicles cf. Benveniste 1931: 72. Reading the first pages of Meyer 1908, one gets the clear impression that the process of interpretation of the Neo-Assyrian texts mentioning *Mada* was still in its early phases at the turn of the century. Consequently, Meyer's role in valuing the Iranian anthroponyms when dating the oldest Iranian settlement cannot be underestimated (Meyer 1908: 20-22: "Wir werden annehmen dürfen, daß damals [i.e. bereits etwa im 17. oder spätenstens im 16. Jahrhundert – AVR] die Stämme der Meder und Perser in ihre späteren Sitze gelangen sind"); analogous importance had his ideas on the modalities of the settlement (*ibid*.: 23-24), and on the high dating of Zoroaster (*ibid*.: 15-16).

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millennium BCE. This dating was necessary to set the Iranization of the plateau in the chronological framework of the Indo-European migrations as assumed in the 1930s, i.e. at the time of the irruption into Indo-European linguistics of the so-called "Aryan" documentation of Mitanni[78]; the assumed route was a Caucasus-NW Iran route, exactly through Media, and this explains the guiding principles of Ghirshman's excavations at Tepe Sialk, and his interpretation of Cemeteries A and B (cf. Ghirshman 1977: 46 ff.).

The circumstances that the oldest Neo-Assyrian documents mentioned only *Mada*-peoples and *Mada*-regions and not *Parsa*-peoples and *Parsa*-regions, and that the first series of labels appeared in a more northern location that the second, fitted well a Herodotean and biblical context depicting a Median state power preceding the Persian/Achaemenid one: according to this interpretation, the Assyrians would have first encountered the Median ethno-linguistic complex and only later the tribal forerunners of the Persians[79]. Also the dilemmatic formulation of the invention of the OP cuneiform script (Median inheritance? Achaemenid creation?) originates from the same generation of scholars: if the Assyrians had encountered the Medes firstly, the Median script (the Medes should have one, as alleged founders of a "great bureaucratic state"!) must have been inspired to the Assyrian cuneiform, and only later adapted to OP.

T.C. Young makes in mid-1960s an attempt to systematize the ceramic data from Greater Media and to correlate them with the chronology of settlement. Though the wide diffusion pattern of Grey Ware, from Sinkiang to northern India and Mesopotamia, did not allow specialists to identify any specificity pointing to NW Iran[80], Young brought out the only element pointing to "discontinuity": the arrival of new peoples during the Iron Age I period, that is from about 1450 BCE onwards, was to be connected to the

[78] On Mitanni cf. already Meyer 1908: 24-27 (= *Nachschrift*, added just to correct his previous dating of the Iranian settlement in NW Iran: "so möchte ich es doch nicht mehr als so sicher hinstellen wie oben S. 22, daß sie hier längere Zeit gesessen haben müssen", *ibid*.: 26). On these questions cf. recently Fussman 2005: 210 and fn. 24; according to Diakonoff 1985: 47 "the possibility cannot be excluded that the 'Mitannian Aryans' themselves were those 'Western' Iranian tribes".

[79] On earlier sources on *Parsa* cf. Rollinger 1999; Waters 1999; Zadok 2002: 142 fn. 23; but cf. the archaeological perspective on the settlement process of Fārs: "the evidence for settlement continuity from the end of the Kaftari period up to the establishment of the Achaemenid settlement system is quite strong. It is generally consistent with the known radiocarbon chronology, but implies an earlier arrival of the Persian population than previously contemplated. It suggests ethnic diversity among the earliest Persians" (Sumner 1994: 105).

[80] One should however note that, according to Tosi-Vidale 1999: 123, the Grey Ware ceramic materials, extremely differentiated in their main characteristics, are incorrectly believed to belong to a same category only because of the common colour of the body and surface.

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introduction of new pottery types in the form of monochrome red or grey-black burnished wares (Young 1965; Curtis 2005: 112-13).

Young's interpretation was widely accepted by the scholars, with a few exceptions[81]. Today, however, it is not rare to meet in the archaeological literature motivated criticism on his proposals (cf. e.g. Curtis "This whole theory is appealing but is almost certainly an oversimplification"[82]).

D′jakonov had completed his updated[83] essay on the Medes and on Media planned for the second volume of the *Cambridge History of Iran* many years before the book was published[84]. Though he could not take advantage of recent archaeological data, which could confirm his assumptions, he independently had gone in the same direction as that emerging from modern archaeological research. I think that few scholars would remember today that D′jakonov was a pioneer in separating the reconstruction of the situation prevailing in NW Iran in the 2nd millennium and in the first half of the first millennium BCE (= Iron Age Iran, Phase II to III) from the quarrel (typical of Indo-European scholarship) on the "splitting" of the Iranian branch from Indo-Iranian.

The core of D′jakonov's views is enunciated in the initial lines of the paragraph *Iranian-Speaking Tribes in Iran* (1985: 41-57):

> "Not later than at some time of the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C. tribes speaking Indo-Iranian reached the Iranian plateau". (*ibid*.: 41).

[81] This explains some definite stands by the iranologists at *L'Orientale*, cf. Genito 1986: 11 fn. (*), where exchanges of views with Sancisi-Weerdenburg are mentioned; cf. now Genito 2005: 317-18 on grey ware as diagnostic of Medes. The *Dipartimento di studi asiatici* at *L'Orientale* discussed in those years with Sancisi-Weerdenburg the organization at Naples of an international Symposium on the Medes and Achaemenid Iran, but the proposal never took shape for various reasons.

[82] Curtis 2005: 113. Cf. already Diakonoff 1985: 55 and fn. 2 ("a direct identification of one or the other archaeological culture with any particular group of tribes would be inadvisable. It would be difficult and perhaps impossible to identify within the boundaries of Iran itself any culture as brought in from outside and thereby define its bearers as newly arrived tribesmen whose language was Indo-Iranian or Iranian").

[83] In mid-1980s, the *Dipartimento di studi asiatici* at *L'Orientale* had projected the translation of *Istorija Midii* (aimed for publication in an English, updated edition). After some hesitation, D′jakonov demanded our Department and myself to hold off the initiative, considering his 1956 vision of the subject completely outdated.

[84] If 1985 is the date really printed on the book, many scholars can remember the long period of time during which the volume was advertised as "forthcoming". This caused its editor, I. Gershevitch, a lot of trouble from the contributors fearing their own essays becoming dated. Gershevitch decided (so he explained to me some years later) not to mention the reasons of the delay in his *Publisher's note* printed at p. xvii of the second volume of the *Cambridge History of Iran*. The curious misprint *Anshan in the Median and Achaemenian periods* (*ibid*.: vii), to be corrected in *Anshan in the Elamite and Achaemenian periods* (*ibid*.: 25), is possibly due to some problem connected with this printing delay.

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As for the Iranian settlement in the 2nd millennium BCE, possibly overlapping on partially Indo-Aryanized settlement, D′jakonov hypothesized that "the ancestors of the speakers of Indo-Aryan and 'Western' Iranian idioms (Median, Persian and Parthian) must have reached the south-western part of Central Asia and Eastern Iran already earlier, by the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C." (*ibid*.: 42). D′jakonov stressed furthermore that "these transmigrations must not be seen as victorious expeditions of conquerors [...] they consisted of separate movements from stage to stage by small groups of pastoral agriculturalists over the spring grass in the course of a number of generations" (*ibid*.: 53). As for NW Iran, if according to D′janokov "certain Indo-Iranians came into contact with the Near Eastern Hurrians not later than in the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C., perhaps in the first quarter [...] the appearance in the west of the Iranian highlands of 'Western' Iranian-speaking tribes should probably be dated to a later period, *although it need not have been much later*" (*ibid*.: 56, emphasis added).

If one considers that the author advanced many innovative ideas also in the field of "Indo-European archaeology" – on which in the early 1980s the debate was just reopening, after many decades of stagnation[85] –, the silence welcoming D′janokov's essay is all the more surprising, because his 1985 essay appeared – differently from previous studies by the same author, hardly known to a non-Soviet public – in an editorial collection as prestigious as the *Cambridge History of Iran*. This silence can be explained only if one considers that the scholars of different disciplines tend to move individually along non-communicating paths: thus archaeologists of Iron Age Iran have always studied the developments of early first millennium BCE West Iran in substantial separation from the historians and the linguists interested in the same period; the same could be said of the historians investigating the occurrences in the Neo-Assyrian texts of the ethno-toponymical series of *Mada* and *Parsa*.

10. D′jakonov's views are innovative also as regards the reconstruction of the NW-Iran linguistic situation in the "Median" period. Even in this

[85] This is a contemporary, schematic representation of the problems involved in the settlement of NW Iran: "The archeological identity of the early Iranians is [...] a problem. Several scenarios have been considered [...] recently the so-called Bactrian-Margiana Archeological Complex [...] has been proposed as that of the Iranians [...] The Iranian immigration onto the Plateau probably proceeded in several 'waves' and along different routes [...] Several scenarios [...] have been proposed along with, allegedly, corroborating archeological evidence. The earliest evidence for Persian and Median presence on the Plateau comes from the Assyrian records" (Skjærvø 2006: 345-46: note "presence", not "arrival"). On BMAC and the Iranian settlement of the Iranian plateau cf. Francfort 2005; Fussman 2005.

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case, it is particularly odd that his reconstruction, first advanced in *Istorija Midii* and then taken up in various subsequent essays, among which D′jakonov's contribution to the *Henning Memorial Volume* (= *The Origin of the 'Old Persian' Writing System and the Ancient Oriental Epigraphic and Annalistic Tradition*, with an *Old Persian* in the headline printed between inverted commas), was substantially ignored. According to D′jakonov, the "language of the inscriptions" (as contrasted to the "real′nyj razgovornyj jazyk drevnyx persov"), is a variety in "its grammatical and phonetical peculiarities [...] mostly (though not invariably) [...] identified as Persian", "bliže po svoemu slovarju k medijskomu" but with "mnogočislennye slova, obščie slovarnomu sostavu jazyka iranskix midjan i drevnepersidskomu"; in other words it can be conceived as "a literary language common to Iranians [...] at least to Western Iranians" (D′jakonov 1956: 369-70; 1970: 121-22).

With the exception of D′jakonov, all other scholars who have felt the need for a change of perspective in the question of the "Median language", have been those with dialectological interests, therefore capable to transfer situations of plurilingualism from modern field research onto settlement processes in ancient times. Some scholars, like W. Eilers, have emphasized that even if "Median" settlements organized in politically autonomous forms have existed, their linguistic set up should have consisted, already in pre-Achaemenid epoch, of many dialectal areas characterized by a sociolinguistic situation producing more divergence than convergence (Eilers proposes three subgroups: NW-Median [Azerbayjan], NO-Median [Khur, Semnan, Sangesar], and South Median [old province of Esfahan][86]). Other scholars, like G. Windfuhr, regard the idea of "Median language" as a mere expedient of modern Iranian linguistics to point to a complex of traits that may have indeterminable links with those traditionally attributed to the language of historical Media ("There is virtually no possibility to correlate that vaguely reconstructed 'Median' with any later dialect. 'Median' simply is a conglomerate list of isoglosses which can be found in a number of dialects of today [...] What has been identified as 'Median' from the ancient sources is that common Iranian in various facets. If one therefore uses the term 'Median' it should only be with the understanding that it is in fact a very general concept equivalent to the traditional term Northwest Iranian [...] Any other understanding can only contribute to the confusion" [Windfuhr 1972: 371-72]).

Abaev, as seen above, even denies the theoretic possibility to identify any form of linguistic variation in reference to a socio-economic

[86] Eilers 1972: 384-85. Note that already Herzfeld 1935: 23-24 had emphasized that "in einem so großen gebiet kann von anfang an nicht nur ein dialekt gesprochen sein: medisch bedeutet eine ganze gruppe".

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organization which should characterize an Iranian settlement of I millennium BCE; his insistence on the sociolinguistic dimensions of the question may recall Windfuhr's parallel emphasis on the fact that the linguistic traits in the Iranian onomastica which we call vaguely "Median", may mark at most "the elite of the Medes in Achaemenid times": to this very elite one should therefore refer "the only known peculiarly Median feature, the very early change of *$*hw \rightarrow f$*"[87].

Finally, different degrees of bilingualism and/or diglossia have been hypothesized in recent analyses: according to Grantovskij, "Iranian languages had been subject to interdialectal merging long before the rise of Media"[88]; Lecoq has pointed on different occasions both to a literary language[89] and an interdialectal koiné[90]; Kellens suggested recently an interpretation in terms of sabir/*lingua franca*[91], i.e. a linguistic system with minimum structure originated from social interchanges between two (or more) communities.

Even in the reconstruction of the linguistic situation, as more dialectological data have been collected and made available, one has realized that the phonetic traits attributed exclusively to some alleged "Median" words are not at all exclusive markers of NW Iranian areas, but

[87] Windfuhr 1975: 468-69; the notion appears four times in two pages, cf., by way of illustration, "the Median (elite, one should repeat) dialect" (*ibid*.: 469).

[88] This is the English *Summary* formulation (Grantovskij 1998: 342), which renders in an approximate way Grantovskij's original wording: "smešenie različnyx dialektnyx tradicij bylo svojstvenno iranskim jazykam zadolgo do obrazovanija Midii" (*ibid*.: 300).

[89] Lecoq 1974a: 56-58; 1997: 50: "C'est [...] une langue artificielle qui n'a jamais eu d'usage parlé". That "das Altpersische der Achämenidenzeit sich bedenklich einer medisch-persischen Mischsprache angenähert hatte" was stated (independently from D′jakonov, as remarked by Lecoq 1974a: 58 fn. 56) also by Hinz 1973: 36.

[90] Lecoq 1974a: 59-62; 1974b: 51. On these views cf. Rossi 1981: 183-86. Lecoq (1974a: 61) declares himself in favour of "une sorte de *koinè*, de langue non parlée, mais communément utilisée par les Iraniens occidentaux", considering "la théorie de l'emprunt particulièrement défaillante" as regards the anthoponyms documenting different linguistic traits (*ibid*.: 60). Lecoq's position appears mitigated in the section *Le mède* of his recent book (Lecoq 1997: 46-50) where the traditional thesis of the political prestige is revitalized ("une partie importante du vocabulaire politique [...] des inscriptions n'était pas du vieux perse [...] nous savons qu'il appartient à une autre langue iranienne [...] que cette langue iranienne devait avoir un prestige suffisant pour amener les Perses à lui faire des emprunts. La langue mède est la seule, dans cette région, qui ait pu exercer un tel ascendant"). In the *Index linguistique* of the book several dozens of words are printed without asterisk and labelled as "mède" tout court (Lecoq 1997: 323). I must anyhow point out that I had not recent occasions to discuss the whole question with Pierre Lecoq.

[91] Kellens 2002: 455: "Après tout, il se peut que les Perses iraniens n'aient été que des Mèdes méridionaux, progressivement différenciés des septentrionaux par leur appartenance au royaume d'Elam. Dans ce cas, leur langue à la double phonétique et aux mots parfois abnormes (*kāra-, vazrka-, naiba-* ...) serait moins une koinè qu'un sabir".

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present an areal diffusion much more intricated, more extended and not yet fully understandable. Ch. Tuplin, judging as an historian and starting from the remark "that the situation is not entirely straightforward is apparent even to the non-philologist", believes that in the controversy about Mayrhofer's interpretation of the linguistic data many things are still to be reconsidered (Tuplin 1994: 252 and fn. 20): for my part, I am convinced that the time has come for iranology, historical linguistics, Iranian dialectology and Iron Age archaeological research to talk to each other more extensively than in the last hundred years.

* * *

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